

Meeting Report - IPCC 30th Plenary, April 21-23, 2009; Antalya, Turkey

Summary: This Plenary meeting of the IPCC addressed general issues related to the 5th Assessment Report (AR5) cycle. Topics included the AR5 scoping process, the development of representative concentration pathways (RCPs) for AR5, the treatment of regions in AR5, and Special Reports and Expert Meetings proposed for the AR5 period. In addition, the Plenary addressed budgetary matters, requests for observer status, election issues, and a proposal by the United Kingdom for the IPCC to produce an interim scientific update report. Issues of particular interest to the US are described below.

Action Items:

- 1) Panel members are to provide their views on questions/topics pertaining to the Synthesis Report and cross cutting issues by the end of May. USG will need coordinated position.
- 2) US, as a member of a task group on longer term issues relating to the Convention, is to provide views on issues of a longer term nature by May 1 for inclusion in task force report.

Scoping AR5: The AR5 Scoping Meeting (July 13-17, 2009) will assemble invited scientific experts for the purpose of drafting the outline of AR5 Working Group reports (WG I, WG II, and WG III). The Scoping Meeting will also identify cross-cutting topics and hold preliminary discussions on the AR5 Synthesis Report. However, to ensure that the Synthesis Report effectively integrates key findings of the Working Group report, the Plenary agreed that there will be an option to hold a second Scoping Meeting later in the AR5 cycle. This second meeting would focus exclusively on the Synthesis Report.

The Plenary also accepted three proposals that provide the IPCC and its member nations with opportunities to inform the deliberations of Scoping Meeting experts. The US was supported all three proposals with caveats. The first proposal was that an IPCC committee consisting of the IPCC Chair, Vice-chairs, Secretariat, and Technical Support Units contribute a list of cross-cutting topics to the Scoping Meeting. The US intervened to insist that Working Group co-chairs be included in the drafting of cross-cutting topics, in order to ensure that scientific experts maintain control of the process. The second proposal was for governments to submit policy-relevant questions or topics to be considered at the Scoping Meeting. The US accepted this proposal, but intervened to note that the questions are intended to provide scientific experts with some insight on what policy makers are looking for in the report, and do not require direct answers from the Working Group authors. The US also emphasized that the development of policy-relevant questions or topics will be an iterative process, and that the primary goal of the scoping meeting is to develop the WG chapters.

Representative Concentration Pathways (RCPs): RCPs have replaced “scenarios” as the IPCC’s tool for defining projections of future climate. Each RCP is defined in terms of the radiative forcing in the year 2100: 2.6 W m⁻² is the lowest pathway and 8.5 W m⁻²

is the highest. In 2007, the IPCC decided to allow the integrated assessment modeling community (IAMC) to lead the development of RCPs for AR5, rather than guiding the process itself. The US strongly supported this decision, as did the research community; it is our position that the IPCC is most effective when it assesses independent research rather than developing its own products.

At the Plenary, the WG III co-chairs presented the results of an Expert Meeting convened to evaluate the soundness of a proposed 2.6 W m^{-2} scenario. The Expert Meeting had endorsed the RCP as robust and appropriate as a low emission scenario. A number of Plenary members, including the US, intervened to endorse the conclusions of the Expert Meeting. Germany, however, expressed strong concern with the 2.6 W m^{-2} scenario, because it does not include a period during which net global emissions are negative. In a contact group formed to resolve this issue, the US consulted IAMC scientists and negotiated a decision that endorsed the 2.6 W m^{-2} RCP while inviting the IAMC to extend all RCPs to 2300 and recalling the policy community's interest in net negative emissions scenarios. The Plenary further agreed that the outcome of the Expert Meeting should be presented in Bonn.

In response to concerns that the development of some RCPs is behind schedule, the IPCC Chair decided to form a “catalyst” group to facilitate communication between the IPCC and the IAMC. This catalyst group includes the Chair, Vice-chairs, and Working Group co-chairs, and will be led by Chris Field of the US.

Presentation of Regional Analyses in AR5: Stanford Professor Chris Field, co-chair of WGII, introduced a proposal to restructure AR5, such that chapters on regional impacts, traditionally contained in the WGII report, would be replaced by an integrative report that would address climate processes, impacts, and mitigation at the regional scale. Field suggested that the cross-cutting regional report could be prepared as a separate assessment, parallel to AR5, could be merged with the AR5 synthesis report, or could be completed after AR5 as a Special Report.

The proposal to move the regional chapters out of the AR5 WG II report was met with considerable skepticism by developing countries, who feel that regional impacts must be highlighted within AR5. They felt that a delayed Special Report would detract from the power of AR5 and would demote regional impact issues by removing them from the AR5 Synthesis Report. Even the proposal to produce the regional report on the same timeline as AR5 was opposed by a number of developing countries, as they do not want to take any chance that regional impacts will lose status within AR5. In the end, the IPCC Chair pushed through a “compromise” proposal, in which the regional chapters of WGII would be placed in a separate volume of the WGII report. The US will need to monitor this situation moving forward, to ensure that the structure of AR5 satisfies policy needs while allowing scientific authors the flexibility they need to write an effective report.

In parallel to this discussion, the Plenary considered a proposal to redefine regions for AR5. The regional divisions in AR4 are generally considered to be unsatisfactory for policy purposes, and there is a general feeling that AR5 should attempt a more

meaningful definition of regions and should provide more information at the sub-regional level. The Plenary agreed to leave this decision to experts at the AR5 Scoping Meeting, but it is clear that many nations have parochial interest in where they fall in the new regional groupings. There was also discussion of whether socio-economic factors should be considered in defining regions, particularly for the purposes of WG III.

Proposal for an Expert Meeting on Current Climate Trends and Emerging Science:

Citing recent advances in climate science that have made AR4 obsolete in a number of respects, the UK proposed that IPCC hold an Expert Meeting on new trends and science. Such a Meeting might lead to a Special Report—released in advance of AR5—that would provide an update on AR4 findings. This proposal will be discussed at the AR5 Scoping Meeting, where Working Group co-chairs will consider options for producing such an update through an Expert Meeting, Special Report, or some other format.

This proposal has its merits, considering recent findings on Arctic climate change, biogeochemical feedbacks, and sea level rise. However, the IPCC has never issued an interim update report, and we do not necessarily want it to take on that role. The US intervened to state that a targeted meeting or workshop, focused only on topics urgently in need of updating, might be justified. The US will stay informed of progress on this idea at the AR5 Scoping Meeting and will participate in the development of any proposed meeting on the subject.

Proposals for Expert Meetings and Special Reports: Expert Meetings on the “detection and attribution of anthropogenic climate change” and on “multi-model climate projections” were approved. An expert meeting on “human settlement, water, energy, and transport infrastructure” was also approved, but with the request that the proposal be redrafted with clearer focus. The US is concerned that this broad expert meeting could give rise to a poorly-focused Special Report. Others voiced similar concerns.

Discussion of a proposed Expert Meeting on “socio-economic consequences of low stabilization scenarios” was deferred until the next Plenary, and is likely to be taken up in the context of future IPCC work on scenarios generally.

The scoping paper for a Special Report on “Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation” was approved. The US is in favor of this Special Report. A number of developing nations intervened to request that the report highlight practical applications in their own region. It was also noted that the report must effectively engage the climate science, adaptation, and disaster response communities.

Election Issues: Complications during the last election cycle led to a number of proposed revisions, and the IPCC Chair formed a taskforce—co-chaired by the US—to review these issues. Also, as a result of residual complaints from the last election, Saudi Arabia requested that it be added to the IPCC Bureau, thus expanding Bureau membership. This request was highly controversial, but the IPCC Chair pushed it through to avoid dwelling on a side-effect of the last elections. This decision was made over vocal opposition, and may feed criticisms of the Chair in the future.

Other Issues:

Progress Reports: The Task Force on Greenhouse Gas Inventories (TFI) reported on their work. Following USG guidance, the US intervened to request that the TFI hold its Expert Meeting on Uncertainty and Validation of Emission Inventories in 2009 rather than wait for 2010. The TFI responded that this would be difficult to schedule, but the IPCC Chair endorsed the suggestion and requested that the TFI try to fulfill the request. The US favors an early date for this meeting because the topic is of pressing interest to institutions involved in monitoring, especially as they work to understand the role of advanced technologies such as remote sensing in GHG monitoring.

Observers: Five organizations applied for observer status at this Plenary. Three were accepted in routine fashion and one was delayed while awaiting documentation. Discussion of the fifth request, from a Taiwanese Institute, was deferred. The Government of China had endorsed the Institute's application, but did so on the condition that it was accepted as an institute from "Taiwan, Province of China." The US does not accept this terminology, nor does Taiwan (the Taiwanese Government was unaware of the application and the Chinese "endorsement").

There was also discussion of the European Commission's request for "special observer" status. The EC had revised an earlier request submitted to the 29th Plenary. The revised version addressed many of the US's concerns with the original, but will still require a legal review. A number of other nations also requested time to review the proposal, and a decision was deferred until the next Plenary meeting.

Strengthening the Secretariat: A request by the Secretariat for more staff was partially approved: one IT staff and one junior scientist will be hired. The US did not object to this decision, but intervened to emphasize that these additions are required for the Secretariat's core executive functions (e.g., liaison with TSUs and IGOs, meeting preparations), and that the Secretariat should not be taking on new outreach or technical initiatives that are beyond this mandate.

Future Directions: The US participates in a taskforce on future directions of the IPCC. This group's next task is to make recommendations on long-term IPCC considerations, building on comments submitted by IPCC member states. The taskforce report is due this July. The US questions the value of this exercise, given the IPCC's present preoccupation with the scoping of AR5, but will participate in order to steer the process.

Nobel Peace Prize Fund: At a previous meeting, the IPCC decided to use its Nobel Peace Prize money to establish a scholarship fund for climate scientists from the developing world. At this meeting, the Netherlands voiced opposition to the plan but was told by the Chair that the decision had already been made. The US shares many of the Netherlands' concerns regarding the Fund. Managing the scholarship fund may overtax the administrative capacity of the Secretariat, and the prize money is not sufficient for a viable scholarship program in the absence of significant additional contributions. At the 30th Plenary, a proposed executive board for the Fund was accepted without comment.